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RE: Department of Scandinavian Studies Review Committee Report

On behalf of the Department of Scandinavian Studies, I wish to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to the Graduate School and the Review Committee for their work in connection with the Ten-Year Review of the Department. We are grateful for the time and effort by the Committee (Professors Naomi Sokoloff, Chair; Albert Sbragia, James West, Rose-Marie Oster, and Michael Metcalf) during the site-visit and in preparing its report. We are also appreciative of the assistance offered by the Graduate School through David Canfield-Budde during the process.

We are particularly pleased that the Review Committee's overall evaluation is extremely positive, noting that Scandinavian Studies is "one of the premier programs in the U.S.," enjoying "high prestige, stemming from top-notch research, excellence in teaching, and community engagement." Of course, we also note several challenges that face the Department and we are grateful to the Committee for their fair and judicious investigation. In response to the Committee's report, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on some of the findings and discuss, in additional detail, some of the Committee's recommendations and conclusions.

The advances over the past ten years, of which the Review Committee Report takes note, are, to a large extent, the result of the Department's deliberate entrepreneurial initiatives to enhance its academic programs while increasing opportunities for its students. While it is not alone, the most prominent initiative relates to the establishment and development of the Baltic Studies program.

Baltic Studies has opened numerous opportunities for students across campus (graduate and undergraduate) and, along with our Scandinavian program, has served as an important pillar for two Title VI Centers, the Center for West European Studies (CWES) and the Ellison Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (REECAS). Begun with primary funding from the Federal government and the College of Arts and Sciences, the program is currently funded almost exclusively from endowments established as a result of increasing private giving. In addition, in 2005, the government of Latvia established a Visiting Lectureship in partnership (50/50) with the Department modeled, in large part, on similar agreements established with the governments of Finland and Denmark.

In that same year, the Kazickas Family Foundation in New York, established the Department's first endowed professorship: the Kazickas Family Endowed Professorship in Baltic Studies. Most importantly for the program, as a result of the successful fund raising, largely in cooperation with the Baltic communities, the Department was authorized to establish a tenure-track position in Baltic Studies. Following an international search, the position was filled with the hiring of Dr. Guntis Smidchens. Today, the University of Washington is the only university in North America that teaches the languages and cultures of all three Baltic countries.

Additional fund raising initiatives, since the completion of the Review Committee Report, have resulted in the establishment of two additional endowed professorships – one in Norwegian, the “Sverre Arestad Endowed Professorship in Norwegian Studies,” and one in Swedish, the “Barbro Osher Pro-Suecia Endowed Professorship in Swedish Studies.” The Department has also been able to establish a fund to support student travel for study abroad opportunities and an agreement with the University of Washington Press has allowed the Department to establish two new book series: “New Directions in Scandinavian Studies,” and “Nordic Film Classics.” As a result, the Department and its faculty have come to play an increasingly central role in our scholarly discipline nationally, a move that will also significantly enhance graduate education and strengthen our scholarly presence in the field.

Among its findings, the Review Committee notes that “a Finnish major has beneficially shaped curriculum development.” Regrettably, although we have developed and submitted a new major proposal, a new Finnish major has not yet been approved by the Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) Board. The curriculum has, nevertheless, been beneficially shaped to accommodate a Finnish major, courses are in place and the faculty to support the major are also already in place. We hope for approval in the near future.

The Department is cognizant of the need to maintain a high level of effort and performance in research, teaching and service. We are pleased to note that the Review Committee recognizes our efforts and lauds our success in all three areas. All faculty members who have come up for tenure and promotion in this 10-year cycle have successfully advanced. With no full professors in 1995, the Department now has three full professors with a fourth recommendation for promotion currently under review. Five assistant professors were tenured and promoted during this period. The Standing Committee of three full professors from across the College was disbanded in 2006. This successful advancement of the members of the faculty is clearly related to the central role of the Department's research mission and the continuing scholarly success of the faculty.

We also appreciate the recognition of the strength of our teaching program and the care taken to ensure its success, especially in our TA training program directed by pedagogy specialist Klaus Brandl, who also serves as the Departmental Teaching Assistant Coordinator. Additionally, Brandl serves as Adjunct in the Masters in Teaching Program in the College of Education, so he is, in fact, one of the primary pedagogy specialists at the University and he plays a central role in most of the Foreign Language departments in the College of Arts and Sciences.

While every effort will be made to remain on the "cutting edge" of scholarship and to continue to be one of the leading Scandinavian Studies Departments in the country, as the Review Committee notes, the Department faces several challenges in the years ahead. It is worth reiterating that the carefully achieved faculty equilibrium can be upset quickly. The Department will look at ways in which sudden personnel changes or position vacancies will cause as little disruption as possible. A revised long-range strategic plan is currently under discussion and will include plans for such changes in so far as they can be predictable.

We are pleased to see that the Review Committee has recognized that space for faculty and TA offices has become a critical issue for the Department. Having to house full-time faculty in offices without windows is unfortunate. The lack of adequate office space has kept us from actively pursuing several new opportunities to bring visiting faculty to the university, most recently a Visiting lecturer in Lithuanian. We simply have no place to put that person. TAs, too, share cramped space in the basement of Raitt Hall, with as many as four in a single small office.

While enrollments in less commonly taught languages are not high, our enrollments have remained fairly consistent over the past decade. Norwegian and Swedish have consistently enrolled well. With slightly fewer numbers in Finnish and Danish, all four language programs support departmental majors and serve as the core of our entire sequence of course offerings. While enrollments in Area Studies courses have grown significantly, language courses are the core foundation of the study of Scandinavian politics, history and folklore as much as literature. The recommendation by the Review Committee that area studies students be required to

take a third-year language course has been favorably received by the faculty and will be seriously considered for adoption.

We take special note of the Review Committee's admonition that "the need for more TAs in the large lecture courses is pressing." Because most TAs teach first- and/or second-year language courses, foreign language departments do not have the flexibility of moving its allotment of TAs from language instruction into large enrollment service classes. We are grateful that the Review Committee recognizes this and supports the need for TA support in large enrollment courses. Currently, we are only able to assign one TA of eight to a large enrollment class. This TA is supported by temporary money, thereby creating the strange situation that the most unstable TA position supports the largest number of students. The other seven TAs have full responsibility for language classes that are essential parts of the overall curriculum and support the various majors in the department. The Department desperately needs one or two more TA lines in order to continue to support its service and large enrollment courses.

The Department has tried to be pro-active in building support for a more permanent large enrollment TA. Most recently we have been in discussion with the Fulbright Commission in Finland which might support a Finnish graduate student who would enroll at the University of Washington with an offer of a Finnish TAship. If this happens, we would be able to reassign one of our other TAs to work with a large enrollment class. We will continue to try to be as imaginative and innovative as possible to meet student demand, pedagogical expectations and programmatic needs.

I am pleased to say that the faculty and staff of the Department of Scandinavian Studies is as excited about the future of the Department as we are pleased with its developments to date. In spite of the hurdles and challenges we still face, we appreciate the vote of confidence from the Review Committee and its judgment that "Scandinavian Studies at UW is thriving." The success in developing a strong area studies program that builds on the core foundations of teaching eight languages makes the Department of Scandinavian Studies unique not only at the UW, but nationally. The success in fund raising and private support is extremely important, but should not be taken as a reason to lessen state support for the Department. Rather, it should serve as recognition of the important role the Department and the University play in the life of the citizens of the state of Washington and the rest of the country.

The Department of Scandinavian Studies is most appreciative for the cooperation and support during the entire review process. Likewise, we want to express our thanks to the Graduate School and to the Review Committee members for their report. Of course, we fervently hope that positive results that further enhance and strengthen the Department will accrue as a result, but that is largely a decision to be made by the College of Arts and Sciences and the University administration.

As the Department of Scandinavian Studies enters its second century in 2009, as the only academic unit on campus established by an act of the Washington State Legislature, we are confident that our three-fold mission of research, teaching, and service, will continue to serve as a fundamental part of the educational mission of the University of Washington.